

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE • THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2019 • WWW.POST-GAZETTE.COM

Health care cannot be tainted by politics

It appears state Attorney General Josh Shapiro has decided headlines mean more than solutions in his newly filed suit against UPMC. Yes, there is no doubt that government must ensure that UPMC and Highmark compete fairly and in ways that benefit their patients and policyholders.

But the attorney general's lawsuit is a bit late to the party. He is promoting himself — not the consumers he professes to protect — by trying to assign himself unprecedented powers to set the rates and terms for not just UPMC and Highmark, but also every hospital and insurer statewide. We can debate the merits of policy — but what shouldn't be considered, much less debated, is whether a state attorney general with no experience in health care should appoint himself as the sole arbitrator of all hospital-insurer negotiations.

I'm from Western Pennsylvania and I have a long history with hospitals and insurers in the region. It wasn't long ago that residents in my area were confronted with a monopoly in both the health insurance and health provider marketplaces.

The insurance market is strong and stable, with consumers having choices among Highmark, UPMC



and other major national insurers.

Area hospitals have gotten better. The separation of Highmark and UPMC has enabled Allegheny Health Network to become a top-quality outfit and it can finally provide a real competitive option to the UPMC network of hospitals.

If Mr. Shapiro gets his way, the Allegheny Health Network will be destroyed and UPMC will be left unchecked in dominating the health care delivery market. This cannot occur.

As we prepare for the final stages of the Highmark/UPMC split, we must insist these not-for-profit entities make sure that it is smooth and fair. Those insured by one of the entities while getting treatment at the other must be assisted during this unsettling time. The courts will hear the attorney general's allegations but let's hope his solution — which is to appoint himself the sole judge and jury of all hospital-insurer disputes — is soundly rejected in favor of real leadership on this difficult issue.

SEN. DON WHITE
Indiana, Pa.

The writer represents the 41st Senatorial District.